

Beowulf Perfect Paragraph

Ideas About Evil

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In *Beowulf*, Grendel reflects the time's ideas about evil. Grendel is the first monster Beowulf fights, a beast of the line of Cain—human, but not quite—who terrorizes the Danes out of hate and resentment for his exclusion from society. He kills the Danes in their mead-hall, the center of their nation, with great savagery—he tears them apart and eats them with his bare hands. His actions are described thus: “The monster relished his savage war/On the Danes, keeping the bloody feud/Alive, seeking no peace, offering/No truce, accepting no settlement, no price/In gold or land, and paying the living/For one crime only with another” (67–72). Grendel's ancestry is important because his situation is based in the idea that evil is inborn—Grendel has been outcast from society due to his lineage, which is considered inherently evil. His descent from Cain shows that his ancestors are all evil, reinforcing it when he is the same. Another point against him is his savagery: he does not relent no matter how far the Danes have been brought to despair. In a society where honor and justice are crucial—they greatly valued fairness, tit-for-tat, and honor—this disrespect for such fundamental values only further reinforces his depravity. Grendel is seen as a force of nature, an instrument of God's anger: he comes “out from the marsh, from the foot of misty/Hills and bogs, bearing God's hatred” (392–393). The idea of some great horror being a punishment sent by God is an enduring one—it has been used to explain the terrors of Attila the Hun, Genghis Khan, the Black Death, and many other great disasters; the idea had certainly taken hold in Christian ideology by the time this legend was recorded. As shown here and as can be seen elsewhere in the epic, *Beowulf* taps into many cultural motifs, and it is only fitting that its monsters would embody its ideas of evil.

Quotes from Burton Raffel's translation of *Beowulf*, as found in *Elements of Literature—Sixth Course*.